Bagworms on Juniper, Cedar, Arborvitae and Spruce

A Summertime Issue

Sometimes, in some situations, the subject content of these newsletters can be just a bit late for the most effective response to a current problem or infestation. After four to five years of writing these articles you'd think that I could anticipate this sort of thing and get out info in a more timely manner. But the quarterly nature of the publication coupled with the unpredictability of the appearance and/or severity of particular problems continues to make that tricky for me.

While bagworms are most closely associated with cedar and juniper, they can also infest arborvitae, spruce and occasionally pine in this area.


Photo by Michael Masiuk

Bagworms are like that. Some years they're bad and some years they're not. This year I've seen more than a few. While bagworms are most closely associated with cedar and juniper, they can also infest arborvitae, spruce and occasionally pine in this area. They are easy to detect because at maturity and even before full size they look like brown Christmas tree ornaments, shaped almost like a teardrop, dangling from the branches and branch tips. The "brown ornament" is actually the bag or cacoon that houses the growing larvae of a moth. As time passes the bags grow in size, thickness and toughness. The developing larvae emerge to feed on the plant needles and in heavy infestations can seriously defoliate the host. Because coniferous plants grow slower than broadleafs and deciduous trees, they are more susceptible to permanent damage from successive infestations. As the larvae grow, the spun "bags" provide an increasing level of protection against chemical treatment. Therefore, if chemical treatment (by topical sprays or injection) is necessary, early application always works better, when the bags are still one half inch or less in length. A thorough spray coverage is important to good control. By August, spraying for this problem can be only marginally effective.

If the number of bags on your tree is small and you can easily reach them, manual removal can be very effective. By the time you get this letter, you will likely have already noticed the problem and the resultant damage if it has been there at all. But education, like some other things, is better late than never.

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Did You Know . . .

. . . that a "balanced fertilizer", such as the commonly used 13-13-13, may not always be the ultimate answer to a perceived tree/plant performance concern. Many things other than mineral deficiencies can be causal in less than stellar plant performance and/or appearance. Just a few of these can include

a) water, too much or too little *(see article on page 4).*

b) pH imbalance which affects how the mineral properties of the soil can be utilized by the plant, even when they may otherwise be plentiful in the soil.

c) cankers and vascular disruptive issues,

d) disease or a hard-to-spot insect presence such as scale or

e) limited or poor soil conditions.

Some minimal detective work can often pay big dividends and is always preferable to jumping to unwarranted conclusions and implementing ineffectual remedies. A soil test can frequently be great help in zeroing in on real issues as well as guiding any necessary plant fertilization or soil amendment program. Because soil changes are not usually rapid, a soil report can be good for several years.